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FRONTISPIECE.



See Page 25.

LITTLE ROBERT

AND

The Owl.

BY MRS SHERWOOD,

AUTHOR OF "LITTLE HENRY AND HIS BEARER,"
ETC. ETC.

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THE NORTH

IN 1841

THE NORTH

THE NORTH

LITTLE
ROBERT
AND THE OWL.



LITTLE Robert's father lived in a village; but his grandmother dwelt in a lone house on the top of a hill about a mile and a half from this village.

One afternoon in the month of January, Robert overheard his father saying to his mother, "Wife, I have been to see our old mother on the hill-top, and she has a bad tooth-ache; I wish she had some of the stuff in the bottle, which did me so much good when my face was so bad."

"Indeed," said Robert's mother, "I heartily wish she had; but I know

not who can be sent with it, as the boy is not come in from market, nor has Hannali yet milked the cows."

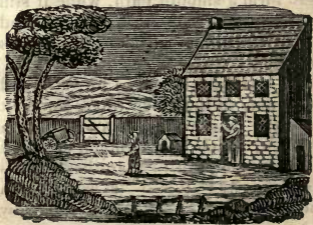
"But what should hinder me, mother, from running over with it?" said little Robert. "Late as it is, if I make haste, I may be there before it is dark; and then, mother, I can stay all night, you know, at grandmother's."

"Very well, Robert!" said his father, "you have a mind of some of your grandmother's mince-pies for supper, I perceive!"

"No, father," said Robert gravely, "I was not thinking of the mince-pies, but of poor grandmother's tooth-ache; and it would give me great pleasure to take her any thing that might ease her pain."

"There's my brave boy," said the father; "that is speaking without selfishness, and you shall have your desire. Look for the bottle and set out: for there is no time to be lost."

Little Robert's mother then looking out of the window, said, "Robert, you must put on your great coat and thick shoes, for you will certainly find the snow lying deep on the hill-side; and the air is very keen." She then put on Robert's great coat, and tied his hat on with a handkerchief, because the wind blew strongly: and putting the bottle in his hand, she kissed him and said, "Good night, Robert! We shall look for you in the morning by nine o'clock at furthest;



so speed away, my boy, and give our love to our good mother."

As little Robert went out of his father's yard, he felt the wind blow very keen and cold in his face. He looked toward the north, and the sky was dark and lowering: "I must make haste," said he, "or I shall be caught in the snow."

Robert's way lay for the space of a quarter of a mile along a turnpike-road, where the snow that had fallen a few days before, was so well beaten as to form a smooth path, while it still lay very thick upon the banks and under the hedges all along the road's side.

Little Robert hastened forward, and soon came to the place where he must leave the road and cross a stile into a meadow, which was as much as half a mile from one end to the other. This meadow was totally covered with snow: there was, however, a narrow

path across it, where the snow was somewhat trodden by a few foot passengers. Robert got nimbly over the stile, and entered upon the little foot-path.

The wind blew very cold and cutting over this meadow. Upon which little Robert stopped, and putting the phial which contained the medicine for his grandmother in his waistcoat pocket, he buttoned his great coat closer about him, before he proceeded any further. From this place he had



not gone far along the meadow, before it began to snow fast, while the wind beat it violently in his face. Robert quickened his pace: but the snow fell thicker and thicker, till in a short time, it was with great difficulty that he could distinguish the path-way from other parts of the meadow.

In the meantime Robert found himself much hindered by the snow beating in his face; the air also growing so dark, that he began to fear being overtaken by the night, long before he could reach his grandmother's house. However he took heart, and said to himself, "Never mind if I am in the night, grandmother will be so glad to see me! and then, I hope this stuff will do her tooth good."

By this time Robert had reached the other end of the long meadow: but a greater difficulty was now before him. He had a very steep hill to ascend, and the hill was by this time

covered with snow, which made it very hard indeed for any one to keep his footing upon it. Little Robert therefore stood still at the bottom of the hill, and began to consider his situation. "I shall get many a tumble down the side of this hill," said he, "before I reach the top; and if I should break the bottle, what a pity it would be! What shall I do?" After considering a little while longer, he took the bottle out of his pocket, and finding it was very safely corked, he wrapped it up well in his pocket-handkerchief, and put it into the crown of his hat. Then tying his hat on again fast under his chin, as his mother had done before, "There," said he, "the bottle is secure, and there it will remain safe enough, unless I come down the hill head foremost, or take a dance upon my head; which," continued he, "is not altogether impossible, in such circumstances as these."



Little Robert then set himself, in high spirits, to climb the hill; and many a sore tumble he got in accomplishing his purpose. For every step he took forward, he slid nearly as far back again; thus gaining little or no ground on his journey, while he wearied and exerted himself to the utmost of his power.

In the meantime night came on apace, the sleet beating upon him, sometimes in his face, sometimes on his back, as the wind shifted from

one quarter to another, and drifting the snow in some places high enough to bury such a little man as Robert. The poor boy had not much time for thought, you may be sure, while he was fighting and struggling with the snow and the wind on the side of the hill; but the few thoughts he had were not half so dismal as one might imagine.

Robert's parents were pious persons, and they had brought up their son with such a firm trust in the care of Providence, that the little boy was well persuaded he had no cause to fear any thing which might happen to him, while engaged in doing what his parents thought right for him to do.

Had little Robert been engaged in doing any wicked thing, when he was overtaken by the snow and the tempest and the darkness, he would indeed have had reason for alarm. But, as I before said, this little boy had been taught to read and study his

Bible: and, young as he was, he could remember many beautiful verses from the Scripture, which were very suitable to his present case, and extremely comfortable to him. And though he had not much time to think of these verses as he was climbing up the hill; yet several of them presented themselves in such a way to his mind, as to afford him sweet encouragement.

At the top of this hill was a wood, which was about half a mile long; at the other end of which stood the house of Robert's grandmother. In summer there could not be a more delightful path than that which lay through this wood to the old lady's neat dwelling. It was as straight as the course of an arrow, and was covered with a green turf, soft and fine as velvet; over which the boughs of the trees spread themselves in such a manner, as to yield the traveller a most delightful shade from the burn-

ing rays of the summer sun. In that pleasant season also, were many birds lodged in the trees, who filled the air with their delightful music; and there also were many of those flowers which love shady places, such as vetches, and blue-bells, and the wood-anemone.

Nearly at the entrance of this path, which in the summer months abounded with so many delights, was a large hollow tree, which Robert always took notice of in his way to his grandmother's: and indeed he had often troubled the old lady to tell him how that tree looked when she was a little girl and used to play in the wood, as she sometimes informed him she had been accustomed to do. But this wood, which in the spring and summer was so pleasant, was now without leaves, dark, and cold; and, by the time that little Robert had reached the top of the hill, and entered the wood, the path through it was so

deeply covered with snow, that every step he took plunged him almost up to his knees. He crossed the stile however and entered the wood; but as the snow still continued to fall in large flakes, he found his difficulties increase every minute.

In this distress he stood still, and began to consider, instead of trying to get on to his grandmother's, which he now thought nearly impossible, whether it would not be best for him to look for some place of shelter near at hand, where he might remain either till the snow should cease, or till the morning light should appear.

It was so dark by this time, that Robert could not discern any object before him. The trees also, for the most part, were so covered with snow as hardly to be distinguishable from the ground itself.

At this moment Robert remembered the hollow tree, and tried to recollect

the exact spot where it stood. After considering for an instant, he remembered that it was at the right hand of any one coming in from the hill, and a little off the path-way; so groping carefully about, he at length felt his way to this tree.

Little Robert was almost as glad when he found the hollow tree, as if he had put his hand on the door of his grandmother's house. "This tree," he said, "will afford me a comfortable dry bed till the morning;" and so saying, he pushed himself into it. The hollow part of the tree was filled at the bottom with dry leaves, affording scarcely room sufficient for Robert to sit down, with his knees up to his chin.

People who have always had a comfortable bed to sleep in, do not know how glad a poor creature, lost in a wood, in a winter's night, would be of such a place of rest as this. The open

part of the hollow tree was happily turned from the wind and snow; and little Robert had scarcely fixed himself in it, before he began to feel quite in a glow. He tucked his feet under his great coat, pulled his cuffs over his hands, and was surprised to find how warm and comfortable he was after all his fatigues. "And now," said he, "blow away, wind, as much as you please; for though you whistle and howl all the night long, you will not disturb me much in this comfortable hole. And if my grandmother had but the bottle which is in the crown of my hat, all would be just as it should be."

As little Robert said these words, he was surprised by a loud hooting noise, as he thought, near to his lodging. He started, and listened again. The noise was repeated still nearer. "That is not a man's voice," said Robert; "neither can it be a wolf or

a jackall—there are no such creatures in England. What can it be? I will not be frightened—I know I shall be taken care of.”

The little boy then looked out of his tree. It would have been quite dark, but for the reflection of the snow, which was now ceasing to fall. Robert however could distinguish nothing moving on the ground near him. He then looked up to the branches of the nearest trees, among which he espied two small twinkling eyes, that seemed to be staring at him. He was at first so frightened, that he could not prevent himself from crying out: whereupon the two eyes disappeared, while he heard a fluttering sound like that of wings. Moreover, the branches of the opposite tree were shaken, which caused the snow to fall from them in large flakes. A minute afterwards, Robert heard the same hooting which had startled him before; but at a

greater distance. Little Robert considered for a moment, and then said, "Surely it is an owl which has frightened me so; and perhaps I have got his bed in this hollow tree. No wonder therefore that he stares at me with his little twinkling eyes, and fills the wood with his hooting. But, by your leave, Mr. Owl, I shall keep possession of your bed-chamber this one night, whether you are pleased or not." So saying, little Robert began to laugh.

The wind now whistled and blustered more violently than ever, while little Robert heard the branches of the trees rustling and the flakes of snow falling from them all around him: but he felt quite safe and comfortable in his hollow tree. Then wrapping his great coat closer round him, and resting his head upon his knees, he began to repeat some little hymns, and verses from the Bible. And while he was thinking of one passage in parti-

cular, which he remembered from the Prophet Ezekiel, he fell into a deep sleep. The verse which little Robert remembered was the twenty-fifth of the thirty-fourth chapter of Ezekiel; referring to that happy time when all the kingdoms of the earth shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and his Christ.

I shall repeat this pretty verse for the benefit of such children as may read the story of little Robert—*And I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land: and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods.*

How pleasant it is for a little boy, or any other person, when left alone and in the dark, to be able to bring to mind such sweet verses as these! Little Robert had always been accustomed to repeat hymns and verses in his bed, and to think upon them afterwards: and what comfort did he now



find in this pious and pleasant custom! So, as I said, he fell into a deep sleep; in which we will leave him, in order to speak of his father and mother.

Little Robert's parents were rendered exceedingly uneasy by the tempestuous appearance of the night: and before sun-rise in the morning, Robert's father set out for his mother's house to enquire after the boy.

As he went on horseback, he did not take his way across the meadow,

and up the hill, and through the wood; but round about by the high-road. And he knocked at his mother's door, just as Thomas, the manservant, was opening the kitchen window-shutters.

"Thomas," said Robert's father, without getting off his horse, "what time did Robert arrive last-night?"

"Master," said Thomas, "I don't know, by reason of my returning very late from market."

"Did not you hear your mistress say any thing about it?"

"No, master," said Thomas, "I heard never a word about it."

Robert's father began now to be more alarmed. "Do, Thomas, go in," he said, "and ask Betty and your mistress, what time he arrived, and if he was very wet."

Thomas accordingly ran in, and calling from the bottom of the stairs to Betty, who was just getting up,

asked what time Master Robert had come the night before.

“What time, Thomas?” answered Betty, “why no time: he never came at all.”

Robert's father had now dismounted, and was stepping across the kitchen, so that he could distinctly hear what was passing between Betty and Thomas: the old lady too, who was an old fashioned person, and always got up at sun-rise, was also listening from her chamber-door. And now you may suppose what a fright they were all in, when they found that the little boy had left his father's house the night before, and was not yet arrived at his grandmother's. Upon understanding therefore how matters were, they began to confer with each other.

“Oh! my poor child! my dear boy!” said the grandmother, “he must surely have lost his way! and by this time he is most probably fro-

zen to death! Oh! my unfortunate child!"

"And the snow so deep!" said Betty.

"And the wind so strong as it was last night!" said Thomas.

And thus they went on, till Robert's father, calling Thomas and Betty after him, ran out into the wood; and the old dog Faithful followed after them.

Now it happened that no one had passed through the wood since the falling of the snow; and consequently the track of a single foot was not to be seen. But the wind had ceased, the morning was fine, and the rising sun, just peeping above the distant horizon, now and then appeared through the openings in the trees. "Mind! Thomas," said Robert's father, "there is not a foot-mark on the snow, all along."

"Aye, master," said Thomas, "how should there be, when it has snowed all night!"

“No, Thomas,” said Robert’s father, “you are mistaken there: for I looked out of the window many times last night, and there was no snow fell after nine o’clock. But look now, I pray you, whether any the slightest traces of feet are to be found. O my poor lad! I am dreadfully alarmed on his account.”

Robert’s father, and Thomas, and Betty, hurried on through the wood, calling the child as loud as they could, but receiving no answer. They looked also to the path, but saw no foot-mark. And Faithful, who seemed to guess what they were about, ran snuffing from side to side: but nothing of little Robert could be found.

At length, on coming near the stile, which opened towards the hill, they distinguished the track of the child’s foot, slightly covered with snow. The father cried out, when he saw these; partly in terror, and partly in joy,

saying, "Follow these! follow these!" Faithful, too, pricked up his ears, and ran before, very accurately picking out the foot-marks.

Little Robert, it seems, had gone somewhat out of the way in looking for the hollow tree: but the anxious father followed the track, calling his son, and dreading every moment to find his poor boy frozen to death. The foot-marks led them round several trees, while they continued calling louder and louder, without receiving any answer. At length they perceived Faithful to make a stand before the hollow tree, pricking up his ears, and wagging his tail. At this they hastened on; when the poor father, who was foremost, rushing forward, fearing to see some dreadful sight, beheld his little boy, wrapped round in his great coat, and still sleeping soundly with his head resting upon his knees.

Robert's father, with Thomas and



Betty, who were now come up, stood before the hollow tree looking on in amazement, while they listened to the gentle breathing of the little boy, which marked him to be in a deep sleep.

At length, Thomas, partly from joy, and partly from wonder, broke out into a loud laugh, in which he was joined by Betty; while Robert's father, who was a very pious man, overcome with feelings of a very different kind, burst into an involuntary flood of tears; a thing, he said, that

had not happened to him, since the day of Robert's birth.

"Well, now," said Betty, "I would give forty shillings, if mistress could but see this: I am sure she would never forget it, if she were to live to be an hundred years old."

By this time Faithful had awakened Robert with jumping upon him; when the little boy, looking up, shewed a face as warm and fresh, as if he had been sleeping all night on the best bed in his grandmother's house.

"Why Robert, my boy!" said his father, "you have chosen a comical kind of bed-chamber!"

"Father," said Robert, "I had not many rooms to choose out of: but indeed I was never better satisfied than when I found this: only the worst of it was, that my company was not very agreeable to the master of the house."

"Well, but, my boy," said the fa-

ther, "how were you able to sleep, cramped up in that way?"

"I never slept better in all my life, father," said Robert; "and I know not when I should have waked, if you had not come to call me. But now, Thomas and Betty, you must, if you please, help me to get up; for I have sat here till I doubt whether I can move a foot."

Thomas and Betty very cheerfully lent their assistance to help little Robert out of his bed-chamber, where the



only inconvenience he had suffered, was, *that* of having his knees and ankles greatly cramped, from being so long kept in so strange a posture. However, when he had stretched himself a little, he was able to walk to his grandmother's; where a good breakfast by the old lady's fire-side soon put all things to rights.

Little Robert always afterwards called the hollow tree his bed-chamber: and when he grew up and became a father, he used to tell his children this story with much delight; explaining to them, at the same time, what it was that made him so contented in his hollow tree.

FINIS.

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